Alva's Deceit and the Manufactured Menace

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Alva's Deceit and the Manufactured Menace

by lefemmerouge

Summary

Alva wants answers about the theft of a diamond from one of the archivists of Steamland, Mx. Lawlor of the Steamland Archives and Museum (SAM) by Elena Castillo Flores of Avalor and her friends. He is disappointed to learn there is no way to get to Avalor without an inter-dimensional portal. So, he uses this opportunity to seize absolute power and dismiss the Steamland Grand Council, composed of those from across the land, in different parts of the city, commercial and otherwise. While he is successful in this power grab and in ordering fellow citizens to begin searching for the far-away kingdom of Avalor, what will his actions mean for those living in Steamland, Avalor, and the world as a whole? Will the people of Steamland fall in line with his creeping autocratic moves or will they resist? Will they see through his lies and the manufactured crisis he created to push Steamland down the road of war with Avalor? Only time will tell...

Notes

To follow the story of those in Avalor, see my companion series, The Avaloran Chronicles. I added in Elena of Avalor, only because it is mentioned, but none of the characters from that series actually appear here. In this fan guide it says that some people click "other" in the relationships section when there is a character who is non-binary (in this case Mx. Lawlor) so I did that here. Mx. Lawlor uses they/them pronouns in this story.

Comments are welcome and appreciated.

Update on 12/13/24: This fic was cross-posted on Squidge World and the revised version was posted here.

See the end of the work for more notes

Alva slammed his fist on the table as he viewed the video recording. He could not understand how something like this could happen. Who were the women which had appeared in Steamland and why had they disappeared? That was one of the many questions in his mind as he sat in his office on the top floor of the Gunderson Steamworks Company building. He received a parcel of mail sent through a steam-powered pneumatic tube directly up to his office.

Mx. Lawlor had arrived. He folded his hands and cracked his knuckles. "Perfect…I can *finally* get some answers."

Mr. Dickens opened his door. "Sir, this is Mx…"

Alva cut him off and snarled. "I *know* who they are. I don't need an introduction. I know who the archivist is in this city, *goddamnit*…go away, shoo."

Mr. Dickens snuck away, ashamed. He couldn't understand why Alva was so short with him sometimes, with an increase in his hostility *as of late*. Even so, he appreciated the job, the free lodgings, food, and all the accoutrements. He tried to keep his cool, but if something unexpected and out-of-the-ordinary occurred, it could throw him off balance, sending him into a downward spiral from which he would never recover. That possibility seemed remote to him.

Listening carefully to the sounds outside the door, he felt relieved when the footsteps of Mr. Dickens receded into the distance as he walked down the hallway, away from his office. Now he could hear what the archivist had to say.

"So, Mx. Lawlor, did you bring the documents I requested?"

They nodded. "Of course, I did, sir. I am dedicated to helping any patron, especially someone like you that has given our institution such generous support."

He examined the records scattered across his desk. Each one told a part of the story. "I couldn't find much on this 'Avalor' that the woman…who called herself Queen Elena… in the archives spoke of…but I did find a drawing, a map, and…"

Alva interjected. He scratched his head. "Do any of these records talk about how one can travel to this…kingdom?"

Mx. Lawlor shrugged their shoulders. They remained dumbfounded. "I'm afraid *not*, sir. There is one account which mentions an explorer…who disappeared…then came back 10 months later…he talks about Avalor."

They sighed. "How he came back to Steamland is a mystery."

He extended his arm and bowed. He wanted to be grateful to someone who collected all this information on his behalf.

"Thank you, Mx. Lawlor. I do not want to keep you away from your important work. I will let you know if I have any further questions. I may even come to the archives to see the scene of the crime…as to say."

Shaking his hand, they departed and thanked Alva for meeting with them.

He was stumped. *How can I get to "Avalor" without a portal?,* he thought to himself. While now would have been the time for a portal gun or a device similar to it to magically appear, it did not. He had the idea of asking all the people of Steamland for any tips or information about these unwelcome visitors who had come to his city only the day prior. Such an approach would take time. What he needed was a miracle of kinds, an unintentional inter-dimensional portal like the one that brought Elena, Naomi, and Isa there in the first place. He knew there was only one solution: to convene the Steamland Grand Council and request their advice on this crisis that threatened the country itself. At least, he believed it was a "threat."

Later that day, all the members of the Steamland Grand Council assembled in his plush office. The council was composed of himself and six other ministers who represented the tourism, radio, entertainment, amusement, exploration, and other sectors in the city. Some years ago, the ministers had unanimously agreed to add a provision to the Steamland Charter asserting that the council chair could assert "emergency powers" in the event of an "extraordinary emergency" *in an effort* to convince him to join the council. He accepted their offer and had served as the council's chair ever since. Due to the peace that Steamland enjoyed with the neighboring states, even after the name change from Dead Monksburg and exploratory ventures by Steamlandians, the ministers *felt reassured* that a state of war or crisis would never erupt, causing this provision to be moot. This assumption would be blown out of the water.

Alva stood up and addressed the council. "You may be wondering why I called you all here," he began.

"As you might be aware, three unidentified visitors arrived in Steamland yesterday and *stole a priceless artifact* from the SAM, a diamond from a far-off land. One of the women called herself 'Elena Castillo Flores, Queen of the Kingdom of Avalor' and another is, reportedly, her sister. The other accomplice is not known."

The ministers began murmuring, disturbed about what he had told them. Alva went on.

"I propose we mount an expedition to find this 'Kingdom of Avalor' and get our diamond back."

He had full agreement from the council until he added the words, "we need to use all our airships and sky vehicles in this mission."

These words did not go over well. The minister of tourism objected. "This would ruin our business…it is a *terrible* idea!"

The minister of exploration said the same. "How can the League of Gallivanting Scrutinators function if *all airships* are used? This is preposterous! If you go through this, I will resign!"

Alva laughed. "Resign? You are *all fired.* By order of Article III of the Steamland Charter, I hereby dissolve the council. All governmental powers will reside in me as the new Royal Sovereign of Steamland."

The ministers strongly objected to this power grab.

"You can't do this!" one minister shouted.

"This is not a crisis!" declared another.

Their pleas went unheeded. He pressed a button on his desk. The robots, which had light bulbs for heads, wheeled out from behind a grate and grabbed the ministers. He sneered. He called the robots by name.

"Charles, Luke, and Matthew, dispose of these interlopers…I don't want to see their faces ever again."

Accepting their fate, none of the ministers objected and all complied with the order.

One minister made him an offer that seemed intriguing. It was Lady Bowmore, a member of the aforementioned league and a lieutenant in the Steamland Police Department.

"I'm listening, Ms. Bowmore."

She smiled. "Sir, I'd like to head one of these expeditions to find the mysterious land named Avalor…I know something…"

Alva interrupted her. "About what? Did you meet this woman?"

She nodded her head and explained. "I took a photograph of all three of them, in front of the SAM…I have the negative."

She reached into her bag and pulled out the glass photographic plate. He grumbled. "That's great, but what we *really need* is a color image…which I can share with the people of Steamland in hopes of getting information."

She sighed. She *had not* expected to receive such a request. "I could send it to my people in the photo studio downtown…but it may take time because it will need to be hand-colored."

Alva shook his head. "That's unfortunate, but I *trust* your judgment. I'll have the technicians take a frame from the video camera which captured yesterday's incident in the SAM, using that for the time being."

Even though he was disappointed, he *knew* that he had to move forward no matter what. His dictate to become the Royal Sovereign of Steamland would only be words if he did not take decisive action. He cleared his throat and said some final words to her. "Send the negative down to the studio so it can be developed and colored. Go down the air port and assemble as many people as possible to start preparing for an expedition."

She nodded and exited the room, taking the steam-powered elevator to the bottom floor.

Soon thereafter, a huge blimp with a screen on the side, and huge megaphones protruding from the metal under girders, descended upon the city streets. In the past this blimp had aired short ads, using rudimentary television broadcasting. It blared out a new, and short message: "Speech by Alva Gunderson over the radio. Listen!"

Tuning in their radios to the right station, Alva began speaking. Everyone was curious to hear what their *great leader* had to say.

"Hello, fellow Steamlandians. I speak to you today with a heavy heart. I was forced today to invoke Article III of the Steamland Charter and abolish the Grand Council of Steamland. I did not do this out of spite or anger, but rather because the fellow ministers would not agree to strong action to end the crisis that plagues this great country."

The radio static hummed as people wondered what "crisis" he meant. Would it be the pollution in the water and air, the child labor used in chlorine plants, or the growing scarcity of resources for basic needs? He answered this directly.

"You may wonder what I mean…I know Steamland is not perfect and we have a lot of work to do…confronting this issue *may* be the solution to at least some of our problems… yesterday, three women came into our country and stole a diamond from our grand archives…we should not stand for this blatant theft of public property by people from…a far-away land with bountiful resources…this land could end the scarcity in Steamland for basic needs once and for all."

Stopping for a second, Alva cleared his throat once more. Drinking a glass of water handed to him by his aide, Mr. Dickens, he then continued.

"As the royal sovereign of Steamland, I *humbly* beseech each of you to join in this effort to find the land I speak of, whether searching the sea or the sky. Lady Bowmore will be one of the major leaders in this effort and is organizing people, as I speak, for such expeditions. No area is off-limits. In the coming days, a photograph of the three instigators will be posted across our city. In the meantime, please report any information about a woman named 'Elena Castillo Flores' to the Gunderson Steamworks building. Thank you for your time."

His speech raised more questions than answers in the minds of the citizens. Despite this, they *still* trusted him. He had helped the city to prosper, even though the toxic waste and use of child labor irked some of the citizens, most of whom were content with their lives.

Back in the tower of Gunderson Steamworks, Alva decompressed. He had never given such a long speech in his whole life, not even when he had joined the council in the first place. He hoped that the citizens would listen to what he had to say. If they did not comply, he would resort to extreme measures, no matter the personal or national cost. Mr. Dickens, who tried to gracious, remained apprehensive as he knew that his boss had lied.

"Sir, you mentioned that this place, Avalor, had bountiful resources…how do you know that?"

Alva cackled so hard that he almost fell out of his chair.

"Oh, Mr. Dickens, sometimes you are so naïve. I knew it would get more people to join in… it was a lie worth the cost."

While this disturbed him, he did not dare to mention it, for fear it would cause him to lose his job. Something else troubled him even more: the *fate* of the council ministers.

"What about the council members…when you said they would be 'disposed,' what does that actually mean? You didn't imply they would be killed, right?"

He moved his head from side to side. He scoffed at the morbid idea he would kill anyone. "Those robots are smart enough to know that I meant…that the ministers be thrown in the river."

This pleased Mr. Dickens. He did not care that the contaminated water, which *everyone* avoided swimming in, would make the ministers terribly sick.

Days, weeks, months passed. Expeditions here and there, across the land, looked for a kingdom named "Avalor" but none were successful. Tips from those in Steamland about Elena and her friends came in every day. Alva got more aggravated. Opening a drawer in his desk he pulled out a Vidua Gelida revolver and loaded in a bullet into the cylinder. He did this carefully. If the loading was done incorrectly, then the pistol would explode in his face! Breathing deeply, he pointed the gun at the glass window and fired. The recoil pushed him back a few feet. He then watched, with horror, when the projectile hit the fuselage of a nearby zeppelin, causing it to catch fire, and explode. All those aboard, a total of 50 machinists, en route to repair steamboats sitting at the docks, *were killed instantly*. No one, apart from those on the airship, saw him fire the gun from his office window since few traveled during the early morning hour apart from workers on airships like that one.

He *felt ashamed* about what he had done and was beside himself. At that very moment, Mr. Dickens rushed into his office and declared: "By jove, we found it, sir! We found Avalor!"

Discretely standing in front of the bullet hole in the glass, he acted like *nothing* had happened. He wanted more of an explanation from his assistant. "What do you mean, chap?"

Mr. Dickens talked about how one of the airships which had been traveling above the clouds, dipped down and found themselves facing an unfamiliar land. He described how the captain took long-range photographs, including some close-ups of those on the ground and Avalor City itself. He spread all the pictures across Alva's desk. Examining them closely, Alva grabbed the image Lady Bowmore had taken of Elena, Isa, and Naomi in front of the SAM all those months ago, which had been fully colorized by a photo studio at his direction. He spotted someone who looked exactly like Elena, standing on the balcony of the royal palace, staring at the beautiful ocean landscape.

Knowing who Elena was and that she was the Queen of Avalor, he *exclaimed* with glee: "Yippee! *Now* is the time to attack!"

This comment startled Mr. Dickens since he *never* thought of his boss as violent or vindictive.

"Sir, are you ok?" he asked, troubled by the mental state of his boss.

Alva snickered. "I'm totally fine. I only want to get back at those *bloodthirsty* Avalorans."

Mr. Dickens tried to calm him down. "To what do you refer, sir? The only time we ever heard of Avalor was when those three women came here, stole that diamond from the archives, and left."

Alva shook his head. "No, no, that's where you are wrong. They *committed* a terrorist act."

He rambled on. "…and killed fifty of the bravest workers I've ever known, who at the port, fixing the wonderful steamboats…Avalor will strike us in the future…I can *feel it*."

He couldn't believe his ears. How could his boss have such misguided views? None of what he said made a lick of sense. He *tried* to convince him to change his tune.

"Is a war based on false pretenses what you *really* want, sir? You'd be lying to the people of Steamland and betraying their trust! For *all we know*, Avalor is peaceful and would never attack us. They probably barely know we exist at all or have any way to reach us."

Alva scoffed. He opened his desk drawer and pulled out the steam-powered pistol, holding it in his hand, with his arm at his side, as a way of threatening Mr. Dickens.

"You are either with me or against me. Choose a side, young whipper-snapper," he declared.

Mr. Dickens was terrified of what Alva would do and realized he had no choice but to be on his side. He wasted no time in *reaffirming* his loyalty.

"I'll do whatever you want sir…just don't hurt me." Alva put the gun away and walked toward Mr. Dickens. He gave him a hug.

"That's exactly what I wanted to hear. I *know* you have concerns about this, but I am doing it…for the good of Steamland…I'd *never* hurt you."

While Mr. Dickens was not entirely convinced by this reasoning, he accepted it and hoped for the best. He confided in Alva.

"For your sake, I *hope* there are no unforeseen consequences from this war." Alva nodded. He hoped the same.

Radios across Steamland buzzed. The host of the Steamland Radio Network (SRN) declared that Alva was about to make an important speech. Out of respect for him, everyone stopped what they were doing and listened intently to what he had to say. *Some* hoped he'd announce efforts to combat pollution, stop child labor, or solve their constant resource issues, all of which had only improved marginally since the last time he had addressed them. No one even remembered the council ministers, who had become a distant memory.

He began speaking as the sun began rising over the horizon, with the rays of light shining down upon the city's buildings. He stood in front of the window in his office, looking upon the cityscape, seeing the smog, and welcomed the promise of the new day.

"Good morning, fellow Steamlandians," he began. "I am speaking with you today to discuss a grave injustice that was perpetrated against some of Steamland's finest this morning."

He then resumed. "Today, a zeppelin carrying 50 machinists, the bravest men I ever knew, bound for the docks exploded. Our assessment is that the Kingdom of Avalor is behind this cowardly, despicable, and terrifying attack. It is only a matter of time before they retaliate."

He breathed in, preparing himself for his most *powerful* statement yet. This would be the hook that he hoped would bring people to his side. "This is why, my friends, the hands of Elena Castillo Flores, the *brutal tyrant* of Avalor, are stained with blood! She *must* pay for her crimes!"

He made a plea to the citizenry. "We cannot let this stand. *Remember the 50*. We must avenge their *wrongful deaths* at her hand."

Alva stomped his foot on the ground. He knew he had to bring his speech to a strong finish.

"As of today, all businesses and establishments in the city are ordered to produce and prepare material so we can liberate Avalor from a cruel despot."

He tried to bring all the citizenry together with his jingoistic claptrap. "This is a matter of national pride. We must all unite against this menace."

He attempted to placate those troubled by the other dilemmas that faced Steamland, saying, "we can solve all the crises afflicting our great nation with this humanitarian intervention."

He concluded the speech, adding: "It is our *only* chance to save our nation from damnation. Thank you and bless the wonderful land in which we all live."

The radio went silent. Cheers erupted across the city. "Long live Steamland! *Remember the 50*!" people shouted. Many felt proud of their city and Alva. They were ready and willing to do whatever was necessary to help their nation. Even so, some were not jubilant. This included those who wanted pollution and child labor reforms, among a myriad of other issues. However, they accepted their duties as citizens. The more radical and revolutionary elements in society, who wanted more sweeping change, *were outraged* and began planning for their next move.

End Notes

Information from references on the "Photographic plate" Wikipedia page and some of the material on the "Hand-colouring of photographs" Wikipedia page informed this story. In the process of writing this story, I re-watched most of the episode "Freak Out!" and parts of the episodes "Steamland Confidential" and "Last Splash," posting some images from them on social media. All three episodes were helpful in crafting the story. Alva's drumbeat of war and jingoistic claptrap is somewhat inspired by the rhetoric by those advocating for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 in the U.S. military, White House, and corporate media. However, this conflict will end up differently.

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